INTERVIEWEE: ED PEARL

INTERVIEWER: Victor Cohen

DATE: March 7, 2009

VC: It's the 7th of March. So you were saying if you had the Ash Grove today it would be easier to do something –

EP: First of all, it'd be fifty years old, so it would be established and accepted as a progressive learning center, as well as the keeper of great American tradition, and the politics would be attached to that, and it would have been having a progressive effect on artists from the South, from the red states, so to speak, right along. You know that Ralph Stanley made an ad for Obama.

VC: No.

EP: Oh, yes. Which is quite a brave act given where he lives in Virginia. Well, Virginia now became a blue state, but he comes from hillbilly country. He's an icon in hillbilly country, throughout the Appalachians, throughout the red states, and so on. Throughout bluegrass music, throughout country music, southern white music. Actually, he's a national hero because of "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" and the tours and his second career. He's a major figure. Yeah, he did. He did that. I have it. I'll send it to you. But anyway, that kind of thing. I think I mentioned the island that Merle Travis found himself in as a progressive.

VC: You mentioned it briefly, yeah.

EP: Who never could talk to his friends and neighbors, where he was able to talk with me. Just couldn't. So he put things in a funny way in his songs, or in a serious

way, like "Down in the Mines" is a serious song. It's not a funny song, but a lot of other songs are funny. He was a good old boy, and known as that, but he had a different – he had real politics. And I think his being in the army took him in contact with other people, and just his own essence developed in a different way.

But anyway, the Ash Grove would have that effect on artists and a reciprocal effect on the Left here in Los Angeles. I simply cannot go to any of these demonstrations that are around in Los Angeles, the peace demonstrations. They're not peace demonstrations, they're buying a particular malice line or whatever it is, the ANSWER Coalition is the world – what is it called? Well anyway, it doesn't matter, I guess. With a guru at the top, who's now dead, but it doesn't matter, and all this kind of stuff. And people, they get up there one after the other and spout rhetoric. At first, I knew half the people that went to the marches, when they were huge. And then at a certain point about five years ago, I looked around and I saw about three people, including one former girlfriend. At least we had each other to talk to. But it was like that. And she's a model. I mean, she's a good person, but she – she's not a really political person, but she went out of loyalty or something. She's a peaceful person, but she – so I stopped going, so did she.

VC: Yeah. Well, don't you think beyond November –

EP: It's again, here I'm doing something that to me seems so logical. Party with a purpose to have something more than just having fun. That is to do things that will be acceptable to a wide range of people, to the young, newly politicized masses. Masses. Not few, masses of people. And to put them in contact with culture and with causes that they can all unite behind, like Single-Payer, like Federal Housing

Authority, rent control. A range of things you could think of around healthcare, around housing, around students and teaching, getting rid of the teach the test system, all kinds of stuff like that that a lot of people – and then as things worsen, and they're worsening rapidly, things with broader meaning, of socializing certain things, like housing and like health. Well, that's what Single-Payer is basically. And some kind of direct WPA, and not just giving money to companies to hire workers. Of course, they're going to hire – I was going to say wetbacks, but you don't say that anymore. They're going to hire the cheapest labor they can find, all of whom come from let us say more than two hundred miles away from Los Angeles, so on and so forth. I don't even know if the labor unions are going to be able stop that stuff.

VC: No. Did you see _____ are getting ready to split?

EP: Right. All of that. I mean, just given that they mounted the national over-teenage population force that work for Obama, it doesn't matter, that's a – well, at any rate, I'm just saying – support, for example, of the group ANSWER, who actually are preventing evictions, support of when workers take over factories like they did in Chicago. That's going to happen here. I mean, factories are closing. A factory's already closed here, sadly. The steel mill and the auto companies, the airplane companies, and so on. Lockheed.

VC: Goodyear, even.

EP: Yeah, the rubber – Goodyear and so on. But in any event, I'm just saying that those kind of things are going to happen. How that – I mean, I'm not an economist. I really don't know a lot of how to – but even pioneering some kind of barter, some

kind of system in which, given that money can no longer go to a central point, i.e., a bank or whatever, and then flow out to agencies which then give loans and blah, blah, blah. Something much more direct and local insofar as survival concepts and a survival system for a community, to get people involved in that. There are people that are growing things in South Central and in various places, and now everyone wants farmers markets here. Even the yuppies go there for – well, they do. But how to get those for poorer people. The possibilities for – and the necessity, given also the environmental crisis.

Anyway, all I'm saying is that the Ash Grove could be a center of all of that, because it was in the sixties, for different things, the Feminist Movement, the Peace Movement, the Personal Liberation Movement, the Free Speech Movement, the Gay and Lesbian Movement. And sadly enough, also the home of where a lot of the younger – given that we no longer – the Communist Party was disgraced, so all of these newer – the Progressive Labor Party, the RCP, Revolutionary Communist Party, the October League, the Socialist Workers Party, the International Socialists, so on and so forth. The more doctrinaire groups, major figures worked at the Ash Grove, or hung around there, or developed there. I mean, they obviously developed probably primarily in universities, but – the point is, now, given that you learn from history, that you try – and the absolute dead-end of that kind of thinking, including the lack of attractiveness to younger people, which was not the case back in 1961 and '2 and '3 and '4 and '5 and '6 and '7.

Now that I know more, and the people around me know more, and we're not all twenty-one years old, we could – and we also know enough not to try to impose

ourselves on the younger generation, but just to help guide them. I think that I could do a great job with that. And the Ash Grove could be a powerful, important beacon.

And now, also we know enough to know that you don't just do something and expect people to emulate it, because that's what I did and nobody ever emulated it. But to actually consider that and figure out how to spread the word better and start things in other places, and all that.

VC: Right. Create other institutions like the Ash Grove?

EP: Yeah. I never wanted to be unique. The fact that not a single other club, to my knowledge, or institution, ever came close to emulating what the Ash Grove did in terms of blending all of that with the great American folk traditions. It's never been done by anybody, other than me. It's ridiculous.

VC: Yeah. I'm surprised it didn't happen more often, given the –

EP: People don't want to – first of all, it's not profitable, I guess. Secondly, you have to be willing to grow and not be just an owner or a boss, or whatever. I mean, I guess – I know I was a boss, for sure, until – (laughs) But at the same time, I've always been completely open to ideas and new thoughts and growth, and welcomed all kinds of people constantly. Anyway, so it just – the owners of other clubs in Los Angeles, and I assume other clubs across the country at that time that were more than little living room clubs, were scared of me.

VC: What do you mean?

EP: Well, because they had nothing to talk to me about. They'd talk about money. They'd talk about acts. I don't give a shit about either one of those things. I mean,

I'm talking about culture and how to – even just on a pure musical level, how to – I felt that anything that I thought was beautiful, other people would also if I could provide the right atmosphere. And that's what I devoted myself to. And also to place that within the framework of people's culture, their culture, without imposing anything on their culture, because I found the elements in their culture to be incredibly progressive. I mean, reactionary, too, but basically there's so much of cooperation and –

VC: I was going to say, like progressive in what sense?

EP: Well, they're all exploited mercilessly. They all know who the boss is, they all know they've been mercilessly exploited. They just totally shut their mouths, and they keep their mouths shut. They know that there's music about it. When Merle Travis comes out with something, or Johnny Paycheck, or whoever it is, they love it. They love it. And then when I put up things on the board that showed their real lives and reminded them of when they went on strike, or that their homes in Appalachia are being absolutely destroyed by slag, the kids are dying of black lung, et cetera. Of course, that's progressive. And then to use that to break the color line. It's pretty easy once that first step is – no, seriously. I did it. In conversation with people. Once that first step is taken. Because they know. They know that black people are used as a guinea pig. I mean, they have prejudice, but they know that basic truth. So it's there. It's there. Aside from – there were always some hardcore rednecks that just would not even listen, but they kept their mouths shut. Around the place anyway. So that's what I mean by that.

And then, the other thing that they share is a deeply spiritual, religious love. Not just the yelling part, you know, when you seen the Southern preachers, but also a connection with the universe. And that's effective because you feel it. You can feel – the whole place would become – people would be connected. And I've been part of that a hundred times. And that's what music does. Great music. I felt the same thing when Ravi Shankar played in the Hollywood Bowl, you know, the breakout after – what's the name of the Beatle, the religious guy? Harrison, George Harrison. After George Harrison studied with him and then actually helped organize the Hollywood Bowl concert with Ravi. It was great. It was just wonderful.

VC: Do any shows at the Ash Grove stick out in your mind, in that sense?

EP: Many.

VC: I can imagine there must have been quite a few.

EP: Yeah. I mean, there are so many different levels of great shows. I think it's sort of wrong to evaluate. You can evaluate somebody's playing the mandolin, but – I've felt great connections throughout the house so many time. Really beautiful music. I think I sent you these stories of the early Ash Grove that this singer Lynn Gold –

VC: Yeah. She had written a couple and sent them to you?

EP: Yeah.

VC: Yeah. She loved the place.

EP: Her voice was so good. It was so good that when she was on, it was just like an angel singing. I mean, I know this sounds – I don't know – well, actually, there is

that record, "A Night at the Ash Grove" record that's now – anyway, on that you can hear her voice as a voice that's better than Joan Baez's.

VC: Really.

EP: Yeah, really. I mean, Joan was such a great singer and all that, but Lynn was definitely on that level, just didn't have the psychological fortitude to do – she actually was the – Al Grossman, Bob Dylan's manager, became Lynn's manager, and for a short while she was on a couple of concerts with Bob. She did it, and then she just couldn't stand it.

VC: I think you mentioned that to me.

EP: Yeah. So she was sort of secluded, so I'm really happy that she's writing these things and doing all of that. She has such a good memory for details that I don't think – anyway, yeah. So, I mean, just thinking of her, or Rita Wilde at her best. I mean, I'm picking people deliberately who aren't known, just were superb artists that just did beautiful work.

VC: If you want to go into it, the last time we were talking about the Ash Grove, the conversation sort of came right up to the moment when it was burned down the first time.

EP: Right, but that was in '69.

VC: Right. You had just had that sort of multimedia show with Country Joe, it burned down, and then you went back to the manager and rebuilt.

EP: Right.

VC: At that point, was the audience still there? Like when you rebuilt – I mean, since we're talking about –

EP: Yeah. I mean, you know, some people were on to other things, and a lot of other people came in, but –

VC: When did it reopen?

EP: I don't have my book with me now. The record people have my book.

VC: You can just hazard a guess.

EP: I think it burned down in April and reopened in August, something like that.

VC: Oh. Relatively quickly then.

EP: Yeah. Because it was insured, and the landlord was insured, so it – Fran also gave me a ten thousand dollar _____, so that carried us through. And the crew was pretty intact. I think I should wait till I get the book, then it would be more specific. I thought you also wanted to talk about what happened with the beginning of the amplified music more.

VC: Yeah, that too.

EP: That was a very interesting period. Can we switch to that?

VC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EP: I feel I will have to go back over that other, the later period, when I get the book. Because that's an important – that's a good question. I'd have to think about it, and looking at the acts and – the other thing is, at that point, I would like you to maybe have Jerry Kay call, or Gordon Alexander, and give you a sense of the politics of what was going on then.

VC: Yeah. You said Jerry Kay?

EP: Jerry Kay and Gordon Alexander.

VC: Right. And I still have to talk to his sister, Gordy's sister.

EP: Lori. She lives here.

VC: Yeah. I need to talk to her about – she and Gordy and NAM. Although, I guess Lori was more –

EP: Yeah. I don't think he was in NAM.

VC: Yeah. She's more pivotal. Yeah, that would be great.

EP: It was very interesting what happened there.

VC: With the amplified music?

EP: Yeah. Because it was different then. When we started the Ash Grove and people were learning to play the banjo, and so on and so forth, they were inspired to play by bringing in the New Lost City Ramblers and then Bill Munroe, and so on. And the Kingston Trio type banjo. It started banjo, but it was in the wrong direction. In this case, we had people who had grown up at the Ash Grove – Taj, Ry, Bernie, David Cohen, the people from Canned Heat, Dave Lindley, a lot of people. And they had picked up on it and were – number one, they had their own milieu at the Ash Grove. The Ash Grove school had gone on. And there was an interaction there of budding professionals all over the place. The Chambers Brothers had recorded "Their Time Has Come to Stay," or whatever it is. So what you had was – they were ahead of me, and they – Bernie and David in particular, because they were around so much because of the school, they kind of guided me in that. And then my long-time friendship with Willie Dixon came into play. So we brought in J.B. Hutto, then –

VC: Who's that?

EP: Well, we brought in the Chicago Blues, basically, and J.B. Hutto is a great player. He played two or three times, I think, and then he died. But a real pioneer of amplified blues in the Chicago area. And then Junior Wells and Buddy Guy. And then the Chicago All Stars with Willie Dixon. Willie had played with Memphis Slim many years earlier, in 1960 I think. Acoustic bass.

VC: So when was this when you started –

EP: This is like '66. I let the – starting in '65, King David and the Parables, which were David and Bernie and Perry Hansen and Dr. Demento. I don't know who played drums, but somebody. What was David Lindley's group? Gosh. I'll remember it.

VC: It wasn't El Rayo-X, right?

EP: No, no, no, no, no. Much before. I can't remember who was first. Either – what was Taj and Ry's group?

VC: Oh, you mentioned it. I have it written down somewhere.

EP: The Rising Sons. They played the Monday nights and all that. And Canned Heat played, was one of the groups. Spirit was one of the groups, primarily because of my nephew Randy. And in the middle of that, I started bringing in the real stuff. So it was an instant hit, all of it.

VC: Really.

EP: Oh, yeah. Because all the groups I've just mentioned, the local groups, all had their own fans already, and they brought hundreds of aspiring musicians and fans to the music. So it was just like a real hit immediately. All of it. And it helped *their* music, and it was enough to implant a whole new division of the Ash Grove that became dominant.

VC: So the traditional stuff kind of –

EP: Yeah. The acoustic stuff slowly slipped backwards. Not Doc Watson or Brownie and Sonny. I mean, there were certain groups that – or when Bill Munroe played, of course. But just in terms of – I never really got the country equivalent. I think because country music had begun to become extremely commercial. I mean, just think that Emmy Lou Harris, who was a young woman at that time, wound up moving to Nashville and five years later became the first, the first crossover artist. Is acknowledged to be the first person to break the cornball express, commercial express, that had settled into Nashville. The more traditional players, Loretta Lynn, and so on, were having a rough time of it then.

VC: Interesting.

EP: Yeah. So there was this period where, well, with the Rolling Stones and the other English invasion, that matched what was going on here. So, basically, it was all black music at that point. So that's what happened.

And the people who were the equivalent of Canned Heat were like The Byrds. There was nobody to teach The Byrds, whereas Canned Heat had J.B. Hutto. So there was no equivalent of older, more mature musicians who could really influence them. And, of course, the white-oriented groups got popular faster.

VC: Like Canned Heat.

EP: Yeah. Well, no, no. Canned Heat – no, no, not like Canned Heat. Like The Byrds. No, Canned Heat is a black-oriented group. They were a blues band.

VC: So you mean more pop. I think of The Byrds as kind of like pop.

EP: Well, yeah, that's what I mean. It's sort of West Coast. The Eagles, The Byrds, all of that. Crosby, Stills and Nash. It's songwriting. At that point, the other thing that happened is, I wasn't the only one who recognized what was happening with acoustic versus amplified music. And the recording companies immediately switched to amplified music. Then they wanted the whole copyright thing. In other words, the big money – the record industry came in with a vengeance. Up until that point – that's when the Troubadour entered the scene also. The Troubadour had been nothing, nothing, nothing. I mean, Doug Weston had no taste. He never did.

VC: (laughs)

EP: No, I'm not putting him down. If Doug would be here, he'd laugh about it because it's true. The group that he discovered was called The Men. They were flaming fags. Forgive the – whatever. That also is not pejorative because I didn't care, but they stunk. (laughs) You know what I mean? He didn't know what he was doing at all, and he was taking Ash Grove castoffs. What happened was, in '65, '66, he started getting all of the commercial stuff that the record companies were willing to put in there, and they wanted a venue. They came to me and they wanted – I had an offer from, I guess, Victor, Columbia, all of those record companies, they wanted to buy me a hard liquor bar and have a lounge, and they wanted to put in all of their class acts. And I really thought about it. I wasn't hot about it, but I said for sure – I could see that if I could get some of those acts, I could put in other acts, as long as it wouldn't be all the time. It could be one week out of a month, something like that, and I'd get the second act.

Well, they refused my bottom line. So I said no, and then they went to Doug. And they put in the bar. They bought a building next door. No, his sister owned the building, actually. Doug's sister. Well anyway, they put in a bar and they did exactly what they wanted. And they started putting in first and second acts. Elton John, all of that. And started competing with the Ash Grove. John Hammond, he called me up crying, asking me whether I'd ever talk to him again if he were to – I told him to go ahead, forget about it. He was actually crying. To persuade me, he told me he was already paying child payments and all of this kind of stuff. He really had debts. I said, "John, please, it's fine. Go ahead."

VC: Wow. So would you have been happy, though? I mean, with like the more rock-oriented pop music?

EP: Once a month, to keep alive, with money? Yeah, sure. One week a month, big deal. I could put on somebody good to be on with them. Sure.

VC: But the deal was take it all or –

EP: Yeah. Basically, they took over booking for the Troubadour, to a certain extent. I mean, not really, because what Doug did, it was even worse than you could imagine. He had this – the first one he tried it on was Lynn Gold, who came to me with his contract, that he wanted – I'll never forget it. It was like he wanted to book her for something like a hundred or a hundred and fifty a week, and he could then book her again at the same rate for five more times. It was something like that. So she wound up turning him down. I mean, I didn't tell her what to do, but I thought it was just outrageous. But that's what he did with Elton John, and that's what he did with other people. I'm serious.

VC: Just locked them into something.

EP: He locked them in, and finally he was sued and he got into all kinds of – but I mean, that's what those criminals did on Sunset Boulevard. That's how they operated. He was on Santa Monica Boulevard, but all of them – Elmer Valentine, who recently passed away, all these people mentioned with such reverence. Elmer burned down his own club three times, for the insurance money. That's how he made money. (laughs) I mean, it sounds funny, but these are terrible people. Those are my contemporaries. I never went to their clubs. I was in each one of them one time, I think. So that was the scene.

The question is, why did no other people – it comes back to nobody else really did it. There was nobody else to do it. You'd think, at least, that colleges would have studied that, or whatever, but that's never been the case. I've never heard of any kind of serious study of what I did, or the Ash Grove in particular, even though it is legendary, and even whatever. And I have never, ever, ever been asked to talk at any college or high school or anything like that. Ever.

So there's something – there's a disconnect. Some people, the commercial world doesn't know how to handle it. Can't handle it. Institutionally they can't handle it. There was jealousy in proprietorship with the eastern establishment of folk music, I guess, and me. Like, I go to Newport and nominally I'm the manager of the Chambers Brothers and the Kentucky Colonels, and both of them are on the Newport Folk Festival. They play in the festival, and John Cohen – you know the people are taking proprietary privilege, without saying – without in any way, but

certainly not talking about the Ash Grove and nurturing it, or asking *me* any questions, or anything. And they were, of course, the hits of the festival.

VC: Really.

EP: Yeah, sure. Sixty-three or '64, I can't remember. *Sing Out!* never covered the Ash Grove beyond a couple of interviews right at the beginning, by John Cohen and Mike Seeger, when I was real close with them at the Ash Grove in 1960 or something, '61.

VC: I'm not surprised. The East Coast tends to imagine _____.

EP: Oh, yeah. And they still do that. When we were making the movie and we went to interview John Cohen, he had saved the flyers that he – the first thing he did, we had just walked in. Ianna and Jerry and I drove up in a rented car, and John greeted us and took us into his barn, which he had decorated with Ash Grove posters, all of which he had designed and all of which featured the New Lost City Ramblers. I mean, it was basically he wanted to argue that the Ramblers were responsible for the entire traditional movement in Los Angeles, at the Ash Grove and beyond that.

I mean, it was preposterous. I had to walk out of the room, I was so angry. He didn't want me to interview Pete Seeger at his house, he wanted to do the interview. I said, "John, this is not about you, this is an Ash Grove film." And we reached a loggerhead and I walked out. I blew up and I said – I didn't want to hit him, because I would have killed him. And I didn't have a car to get out of there, but I wanted to get out of there. I was so angry. And then he wrote me a letter accusing me of trying to shut the Ramblers out of the movie. "I can see that you're trying to shut the Ramblers out of the movie." Because Jerry had written him – I

can't remember what, some – I mean, it just – it's insane. It's insane how they – I don't know, whatever it is. It's that hostile competitive environment.

It has nothing to do with any of the broader goals that I've been talking about to you since the day you walked in the door. It has nothing to do, nothing, nothing, nothing – I welcomed their help. I also welcomed the help of all the other people that did the same thing. Ralph Rinzler was a little bit different. He understood, even though he was not political at all. Not at all.

VC: But he understood what was going on.

EP: Well, he respected what was going on. The Great American Folk Festival he puts on, that he instituted, has all the folk crafts and all that, but not a word of anything I've been talking to you about all this time. Not a word. Not a word. None. Zero. I sound angry? You're fuckin' right I'm angry. Not a word. He's deprived those people of having their lives properly presented. He wouldn't look at – he's gone now, but he wouldn't look at it that way. That's the result of it. Being assiduously anti-progressive, hostile to politics. I mean, he was happy. He had Robert Byrd sponsor the thing in Congress. So would I have done the same thing, but I would have also – I wouldn't have to talk to Robert Byrd about conditions in the mines. I wouldn't have to. He would know them. And I could talk to him in language he would understand and not be offended by.

VC: Yeah. It's a mystery how people can –

EP: They're terrified. They're terrified of being political. I go back East and John had a meeting the next – he said, "Well, it's not really political, it's just about the college –" So people get involved in activities that are safe and nice. Probably voted for

Obama. That's it. My first really – well, I went out Wednesday, which was a mistake. I had a bunch of errands to do, and to look at the – I'm doing this thing on Sunday. I'm looking at the next one. The Cinco de Mayo plays at a gallery near here on May 10th. So I took my assistant, David _____, and then we prepared for our meeting with the African Marketplace guy, where I want to do the big summer thing, this coming Wednesday. I was supposed to meet him on Wednesday, but I was sick so I couldn't. Anyway, so we did a few errands.

But my first day out was yesterday, with a really good friend of mine from martial arts that I've known for – a great martial artist – for twenty years. She hasn't been around for a while. She came into town and then she's moving back to New Mexico. So we spent the morning together. And she's really a good person. What she does in New Mexico is, she's an advocate for Native Americans, a lot of important issues that they have. And is a teacher there on the reservations, and whatnot. But she doesn't know anything about politics, and she just – and she kept wanting me to tell her all the good things about Obama, because he's a person of good will, and she loves him, and _____. (laughs)

But she's very smart. Her dad was a Cal Tech professor. So I said, "Jennifer –" And I told her about my political list, and so she's going to get three friends to do it. Today, right before she left – I went to class yesterday and today, and I told her that I want her to be on the list, too, and the worst she could do is she could erase it. But she doesn't have the basis for understanding anything, until I explained – we had a really long lunch, and I explained a few things about it and made sense to her. So I wanted her to do that.

So anyway, I'm just saying people are – you can be a good person and do good work and hide your head from the reality of what's going on in the world, and not change it, therefore.

VC: What do you think made people more willing in the sixties? Like around the Ash Grove, for example.

EP: Well, there come these periods. Like Naomi Klein says – she called it shock and –

VC: Yeah, shock and awe, like a phenomenon of shock and awe.

EP: Yeah. Well, it also goes two ways. It was like the gases build up and then there's an explosion. Well, the gases built up in the fifties, and young people in the sixties didn't want any part of that. They were tired of – how long can you tell kids not to have sex, not to do this, that you respect only your parents, and when you see your parents are empty and bad things are happening, and your parents tell you not to look at it and to just listen to them and do the – well, young people's inner emotions simply don't accept that. There has to be a rebellion. There has to be a statement of self that comes with sexuality and the rest of it. That's why kids go crazy, or leave home, or become serial killers, or whatever they do. There's a lot of problems there then.

Well, that happened in the fifties, and that happened during these Bush years. The war is wrong, it keeps going on. The economy is shit, it keeps going on. Your liberties are taken away. Then, here comes an articulate African American, handsome, brilliant man who makes sense. It's like, Yes! Yes! Yes! Let's change. So there's the explosion. And now it's being tapped out again because he's – it's rough on him, and that's what's, I think, keeping a lot of people

loving him. He's up to seventy-two percent this morning, so he's even increasing in popularity because people don't have anywhere else to go. And the Republicans don't exist.

Like I was telling Jennifer, there are two things. One is bad, there's no socialist party, there's no labor movement, radical labor – the other thing that's good is that there's no Hitler and there's no fascist movement in Europe and this country, and there was a fascist movement in this country. I never saw it, but anyway, it was here. Father Coughlin and – _____ this thing against Gerald L.K. Smith when I was a kid, but I had no sense whatsoever that he was part of a fascist movement. (laughs) It's just that he was a bad man that was talking about blacks and whites, racist stuff. But I really didn't have the scope of what had happened in the period of the thirties.

So I think that that's what it is. There was an explosion in the sixties that, even after it ended, found further massive inroads into who taught college and what they taught. And the G.I. Bill still having an effect, and so on, to more educate a class that happened out of World War II. So all that was really good. But that reached its final compromise sort of with new labor in England and with Bill Clinton basically changing the terms of welfare and playing the race game, race cards, and all of that kind of stuff that he did. And the blockade of Iraq and preparing the way for – I don't know what he could have – I think he should have done something. Probably, as president, he could have done – he was so discredited by the Monica Lewinsky stuff, he was neutered, and he didn't do anything when Al Gore was deprived of the presidency. He let that whole thing

come down. He was not the same Bill Clinton as he was three or four years earlier. But anyway, the whole Clinton thing was the denouement, the last gasp of that cycle.

And George Bush was so outrageous and so bad, and Dick Cheney so rotten, such blatantly evil people that Obama comes in with all our hopes at the same time these other people have destroyed the economy, possibly the capitalist system. So I don't know what's going to happen. All I'm saying is that the possibilities and the needs are limitless.

My little part should be emulated on a grand scale, but it won't be. I mean, musicians are good people. Bruce Springsteen is a good person. Sean Penn is a good person. There are a lot of wonderful people. Joan Baez is a wonderful person. They're all wonderful, but they don't know how to organize what I'm talking about. There are very few people that do know how to organize that. Obama could conceivably, but he wouldn't be president then. So I really don't know. I really don't know what's going to happen. All I can do is do what I'm doing and see what happens.

VC: As the Ash Grove kind of wound down, did it seem that the connection between music and politics wasn't as strong, or as obvious?

EP: You mean at the end of the Ash Grove?

VC: Mm-hmm.

EP: To me?

VC: Mm-hmm.

EP: No. Not at all. It's just that the number of people that I was able to bring from Appalachia who had worked in the mines _____ severely, and could still make money. And I was willing to accept that for a while and go into – and the needs still exists. They exist here. Go into knowing how to do it. I had spoken with Jane Fonda about hosting a film series. And I wanted to have a lecture series. But I no longer had the energy, really. I mean, I would have done it, but I would have needed a new burst of energy from an audience, and all of that was very difficult, with fewer people around who understood. Everyone, my help, the people that understood what I was doing having their own lives and having children and careers.

Like Jerry going off with the farm workers in the seventies. Well, he was still _____. He was in the inner circle of the farm worker leadership then. He developed a retirement program, housing for seniors, farm workers, and a lot of that. He did it, by the way, by staying away from Cesar. He and Cesar kept as good friends, but he never crossed him, because he saw what happened to all the people that crossed him. And Gordy got his degree and started teaching history. Now he's head of the union.

VC: Where is he?

EP: Glendale College. He never finished his thesis, but other than that, he's a Ph.D. He doesn't care. He's really a very powerful, down-to-earth, knowledgeable negotiator, which he was the chief negotiator for like twelve years. He didn't want to be president, just that. He was supposed to help me full time, or close to full time. Significantly he was going to help me with the fiftieth anniversary, but the previous

September, I'll never forget it, we were sitting in his living room and he gets a call from the head of the union that he had personally educated and gotten to run. So Gordy was the pillar there. Anyway, he decided to quit teaching at Glendale and move to Ohio or someplace like that. And it was irrevocable. He had a job offer and that was that. So that meant that they had to find somebody else to replace him.

Well, after a month or a month and a half search – and Gordy was immediately very downcast about it. I was sitting there with him when he got the call, and we were just talking about the Ash Grove and the concept, which had he been around, he would have used that to take into the schools and do all of that. But in any event, after the month-long search and the next election, the emergency vote for the thing, the other people that were ready to run were totally incompetent, so he refused to let that – and he could win hands-down easily. So that's what happened. He just put up his name and everyone else supported him. So they even dropped out of the race. But it would have been a dogfight, and none of them was capable of doing it. I trust him completely on that level. So he's the president of the union, which means he's only teaching like half time. He actually gets paid full time, that's part of their contract, which he negotiated. But he never thought it would happen to him.

But he's just involved in so much crap now that I barely see him. He did help me do – he did the seating at the Hollywood – I don't know if you saw him. He's a real big guy.

VC: I don't know. Maybe.

EP: You must have seen him when you first walked in. He's hard to miss. And he's got a conference or something tomorrow. I don't need him, but I wanted him. I feel very – he was with me – he and Jerry were with me behind stage, and Eric was doing the operations, because they were liaison between the artists, and they know everything. So I feel very confident when I'm with them, and I can do what I know how to do.

VC: And he was with the Ash Grove –

EP: Starting in '68.

VC: How old was he when he started?

EP: Well, I think he was still going to UCLA, so like twenty, twenty-one. And Lori worked at the Ash Grove as a cashier. She started when she was in high school, in '72. She was the head of the high school Student Peace Union. Peace Alliance or Peace – a citywide thing. It was during the Cambodian thing.

VC: Really.

EP: Yeah, that's when she was there. And then she became a cashier. But they met at the Ash Grove, because at the time high schools wouldn't let students be political. The principals could do whatever they wanted to, and they simply would not allow those meetings. They couldn't get a place to meet, and the university wouldn't rent to them. And Lori was Gordy's sister. So they met at the Ash Grove. So on Saturdays, during the day, they'd have these high school conferences, of all the high school peace groups.

VC: Wow. So that was after –

EP: That was Cambodia.

VC: So that was sort of the second – when was the Ash Grove burned down the second time?

EP: I think it was '72. Yeah, '72, probably. Or '71. But I think '72. I'm not sure. Anyway, that was the fire where people were caught and went to prison and all that.

VC: Wow. Who was it? Was it the same people who did it the first time?

EP: Some of them. But the first one was done by Cuban terrorists, the Alfa whatever – the brigade that lost at the Bay of Pigs. The second one was planned – I never told you all this?

VC: No, no, no. The first one you had mentioned because we had talked about it, but the second time, no.

EP: Well, I could tell you the story, but Gordy can tell it better because he was there. I used to love horses, rode horses a lot. My daughter Marnie loved horses and was a champ rider. I don't think she was with me. I was on a horseback ride on a Sunday afternoon, with other people, other riders. And at about five in the afternoon, or six, I can't remember. I don't know, I wasn't there. Anyway, late in the afternoon, when the Ash Grove was closed and the only people in there were the night manager, Gordon Alexander, the cleanup guy, Lee Stone, and Berta _____, the cashier, preparing for the evening. We never locked the door or anything.

VC: In the afternoon?

EP: Well, somebody's inside. I don't know. Maybe it was hot or something. The door was probably propped open, hooked open, whatever. A group of eight armed men came in from two sides, three from the front, four from the back, something like

that. Eight men. They had rifles and a shotgun and a bullwhip. The guy with the bullwhip and shotgun took a position at the door, and they asked Gordy if he was Ed Pearl, and he said no. They told them to lay down on the floor. Right in the middle of the – it was the area in the front room, right before you go into sort of the place where all the plumbing was. The kitchen's on one side and the bathroom's on the other side of the cashier's booth, right there, and then into the back room, the concert room.

They hit Gordy in the – fortunately, in the buttocks, not in the back, with a rifle. And they asked where I was, and he didn't know. I don't think he knew, actually. And one guy goes upstairs with a gun, and there's Berta counting the money. And Berta – not a small woman, may I say (laughs) – thought she was going to be raped. I mean, what does she know? And Berta did not have a political bone in her body. So she jumps up, and she runs right by the guy, who's astounded. He just stood there. And then she runs out past the guy with the bullwhip and the shotgun, who probably saw this large woman running out and had no idea what to do. (laughs) So she ran out in the middle of Melrose, screaming.

So go back five minutes from then, five minutes earlier. Outside, two of the waitresses are being driven to work by the father of one of them, former fire captain Swenson, and his daughter Patty, and I think Anita _____. I think so. Because she was the head waitress. So they're coming to work, and Mr. Swenson drops them off a little bit west of the Ash Grove and they start walking there. And there comes Berta running out the door, screaming, in the middle of the street, followed by three men.

What had happened inside is that after they put them down there, Gordy and Lee, they started pouring gasoline all over the place. They'd only gotten so far as to that area, and when Berta came running out, at that point they aborted the mission, five of them ran out the back, three of them ran out the front, and they jump – where Anita and Patty are walking to work down the street. And here's Berta ran outside. And they jump in their car and speed away.

The ones from the back are never heard from again. The ones from the front, they jump in and they head east towards Fairfax, not knowing that Mr. Swenson, being the fire marshal, or fire captain, whatever the hell he was – anyway, retired fire, loves danger. (laughs) And all these – he hears a siren and go follow it. So what he did is he started chasing them in his car. I don't think he had any idea how dangerous that was, but that's what he did. Because that's what he does. That's what Patty said, "My dad does that all the time." He helps the fire thing. He can tell the difference between a police and a fire. In this case, there was no siren, but he just followed those guys. Because obviously they did something to Berta, and he knows Berta like he knows Anita. They're close friends of his daughter.

So, comes to Crescent Heights. It so happens that there's traffic on Crescent Heights and there's no way to get around, so they try to make a U-turn. So he pins their car on the north side of Melrose Avenue, and they jump out of the car with automatic weapons. At the same time, in all probability by coincidence, a police car is driving west on Melrose from Fairfax towards Crescent Heights. They see this whole little action scene, and they saw the weapons. They turned on the lights,

turned on the siren, pulled their weapons, and come out ready to fire. The people that had the weapons put them down and surrendered. And they were arrested right there. And Mr. Swenson – you know, you don't bullshit with a fire captain. In other words, there was no way to bullshit your way out of it with Mr. Swenson saying there's my daughter, don't tell me, whatever it was. There was no argument there.

So we switch now to the Hollywood police station. But I have to take you back to 1968 and 1969. The police were hated in Los Angeles. There was like a whole thing. They were killing Panthers, they were beating up hippies, they were – if there was a free speech movement in the parks, they would bust it. The police were out of control. It was still Chief Parker, the worst, and they were really outrageous. They could not get enough recruits, so what did they do? The LAPD opened a recruiting station in Saigon, where they recruited newly being released soldiers, veterans. They did not want anyone from Los Angeles. In fact, they were recruiting with a high priority southern white country boys. So they recruited southern white country boys into the Los Angeles Police Department. A number of them were in Hollywood.

Guess where they went for entertainment. To me. To the Ash Grove. They were like southern boys like the other southern boys. I didn't know who was there. If they weren't dressed like cops – whatever. One time Jerry came running to me, "Ed, there's a cop in the front room. He's demanding to see you." So I went out there and he says, "When is Doc Watson coming?" (laughs) So we became friends sort of. The other thing was, he was an artist, and he drew profiles of me, of Doc, of

everybody. He loved country music, he loved this and that. He was an Ash Grove fan.

Total coincidence, he's the desk officer at the station on that afternoon. The story he tells me later is this. They bring in the three suspects. He hears the Ash Grove, and he's immediately – then he gets a call. "This is the FBI. You probably have three people arrested there. We don't want you to book them until we get there." And they're like four blocks away already. So he had them held there, and the FBI came in there, and they talked with them. And then they booked them. I don't whether the FBI tried to talk them out of booking them, or not, but they booked them. I mean, he simply would not have – he would have arrested the FBI people. They're not allowed, I don't think, to pull their guns, or whatever. But anyway, it's not their jurisdiction. FBI's Federal Bureau of *Investigation*, and they're not supposed to have that authority, at that level. So he booked them and they went to jail.

So as soon as that happened, he tried to get in touch with me. So he calls the Ash Grove. Well, the phone lines were burnt. So when I called the Ash Grove, I went from riding my horse, cooling him down, and so on and so forth, and getting him stalled. And then I – there was some kind of political meeting that I went to that afternoon, late in the afternoon, or maybe early evening, I can't remember. And I called the Ash Grove to check in, and the line was busy, which is quite surprising because I had five lines. And it's Sunday night, and I can't remember who it was, but it wasn't the biggest, you know, a full house act. It just wasn't. It was like a two-waitress act that was playing. So at that point, because that had

happened, the phone being busy the first time I was burned down, I knew what it was. I knew something had happened, so I drove over there.

Anyway, so he told me that later on, so I never got that phone call from him. It didn't matter. But anyway, that's what happened then. So that meant that there was something a lot bigger than what happened.

So then there was a hearing around this arrest and what happened in the Ash Grove. I started getting phone calls before the hearing, "We have the back of your head in our sights. You'll be a dead man," this and that, you know, threats.

VC: And you didn't know from whom they were coming.

EP: Well, I figured it was the Cubans.

VC: Had there been like another –

EP: No, no, no. I'll get to that. I'll get to that. I mean, once the word went out with that reputation the first time, the police had their eye on me. Like I said, there were two different kinds of cops. There were the cops who – like my friend on the desk, and all the other – the Hollywood cops loved the Ash Grove. When they'd pick up the kids on Sunset Strip and they were high or loaded or stupid, or doing nothing, they'd tell them, "You should go to the Ash Grove because you hear good music, you'll have a good time, and it's a good place." So I did have all that. At the same time, there were the people who were just inveterate leftist haters and had me pegged – they call it a beatnik still. But anyway. Whatever it was, they didn't want it.

Anyway, so there were those kind of things, divisions. I think that I was far more outnumbered by the police who saw the value of the Ash Grove than the other kind, but it doesn't take many to really do something wrong.

So I got these threats. I never reported them to the police or anything. Anyway, so I went to the hearing and I was called. I was the first one called. And for the first time, I saw a woman judge. It was really amazing to me. She says, "Okay, Edwin Pearl, and where do you live, Mr. Pearl?" I said, "I'm sorry, Your Honor, I can't tell you that." She says, "Mr. Pearl, you have to do that. If you don't, you're in contempt of court." I said, "Well, Your Honor, they're calling up and saying they want to kill me, and they've got my head in their sights," and so on. And there are the defendants sitting there and all that. By the way, they were bailed out very quickly from jail. I think there was a significant bail, too, because they got – the money showed immediately. I never got into the details of that. It wasn't that necessary, as you'll find out.

She hears this, she turns to them and says, "If there is one other threat of any kind to anybody associated with this case, or anybody not associated with this case, claiming anything about this case, I'm revoking your bail immediately." They disappeared that night, all three of them. They were gone.

Flash forward to the Watergate hearings. When L. Patrick Gray, the head of the FBI, was apprehended on the Washington Bridge, whatever, with all the receipts for the Committee to Reelect the President stuffed in his trunk – you may recall that. Unfortunately, that happened on a Friday, the worst news night of the week. And what they were worried about is another commission like – I can't

remember the thing with – well anyway, what did happen later on, I think, with the whole security thing that happened after Nixon was indicted.

Anyway, so the FBI wanted to clear up its image. What I know is, that night, after these guys left – this was like – the hearing was a couple months after the fire. And we had repaired that, really. It just took – we canceled Sunday night and we opened the next Friday night.

VC: So it was relatively minor.

EP: Yeah, it was relatively minor. The thing is, people just came – I mean, people that I had known, had worked and helped build the Ash Grove, just showed up because they heard about it on the news. Like Paul Rosenstein, the son of the guy that originally put in electricity, two carpenters who really knew what they were doing, and just – and they worked all week and patched it together. My friend Lenny Stein, whose sister I used to teach guitar to, is a master painter and he showed up and had all these painters, and they were painting up and down. I said, "Ed, get rid of them. I'll do it myself." (laughs) He had about five people painting, and Lenny did it about four times as fast as all of them put together. He knew what he was doing and he just painted the whole place. That was really funny.

Anyway, so they were never to be heard from until the middle of Watergate. This happened when Patrick Gray – the FBI puts out a thing, and my three are part of the top thirty criminals wanted. They were arrested the same night in Florida, Connecticut, and New York City. Interesting, huh?

VC: Unbelievable.

EP: Right. In other words, the FBI knew where they were the whole time. Okay. Go forward another while. At the end of the Ash Grove, the last year or year and a half, I hired – well, there were all kinds of trials going on, and this and that, and a Left legal collective called the Bar Sinister, meaning left in French – I always wondered what – it was spelled sinistre like the French, but I was just wondering whether that was – but also, it's sort of a great name. I just wondered what people thought about when they saw that thing that didn't have the vaguest what it meant in French. In their collective, the people lived in a big house, and they bought collective food, and I think they got twenty-five dollars a week. Well, I had about three waitresses and some kitchen help that worked part time in the Ash Grove, you know what I mean?

Including Beth Lindsey, cum laude from Harvard, *Harvard Law Review*, et cetera, the whole thing. One of her classmates, a close friend, African American, became Ted Kennedy's head lawyer. Okay. He comes to Los Angeles ten years later, and they have dinner together. And he says – you remember Ted Kennedy was the one put in charge of investigating the Nixon White House after – maybe you don't know that.

VC: No, I don't know.

EP: His committee. So they have that and they have a nice reunion, and he says, "Oh, by the way, tell your friend El Pearl that the plot to burn the Ash Grove –" and there were also three other places. There was the sectarian malice thing, there was the Socialist Party bookstore, and there was the First Unitarian Church, where they tried to throw a firebomb. What they did at the – it was called the Long March,

which relates to Mao's Long March, the Maoist thing that was happening, their organizing hall, which was a big hall not too far from here, on Hoover Avenue – was that they pulled automatic weapons on a huge number of people and had them go outside and lie down, and they burned the place to the ground. And that was the end of the Long March. The bookstore got pulled down and somehow fire – they left before the fire completed gutted everything, so they were saved. And the Unitarian Church they couldn't get open the huge doors that were built in 1917 or something like that. (laughs) Like, "Let us in. Let us in." _____ Unitarians. It's not like a Catholic church, you can come – anyway, they just bounced off _____. (laughs) So they just threw something, threw a firebomb.

So anyway, it was planned in the basement of the White House. It was part of the Houston Plan. So it had to be '72. Why? Because the Houston Plan had to do with opening up the – they expected riots after the closure of the schools in California. Remember, Ronald Reagan – well, he did, he closed all those colleges. I don't know what he did with the high schools, but – and the Republicans had their convention in '72 in San Diego. Well, they had plans to arrest Tom Hayden and all of the radicals they expected to be around the Republican convention. In fact, they got so afraid of it that they moved the convention to Miami about a month before the convention was to happen. So the '72 convention – where McGovern was a Democrat versus Nixon, it's his second term –the Republicans had their convention in Miami, not in San Diego. But in the meantime, they wanted to take care of all of the gathering spots in Los Angeles, and that was what the Houston Plan was part of, what I fell into.

VC: Which is why the FBI knew about the guys –

EP: Well, it was obvious that Hoover was in on it and had his agents – and then, later on, something happened that completed the picture, at least as far as I know. Oh, also – well, by that time, the third fire had occurred, by the time of the Watergate and the rest of it, and what I'm about to tell you. And I was called into a meeting by the arson department at a fire department, so I had sense enough to take – do you know who Marilyn Katz is? You must know.

VC: Yeah. Why does that name ring a bell?

EP: Well, she's kind of the head of the Peace Movement in Chicago. She's been a major force in Chicago.

VC: Okay.

EP: Anyway, Marilyn was one of the people I hired as a waitress. Very good waitress. Very good waitress. I mean, could make tips. Just cute, sweet, smart, funny. She could get big bucks out of people, you know, classical big city girl comes to Los Angeles, and she put on a tight skirt and that was it. (laughs) She would just do everything.

So I took Marilyn with me. I wanted somebody who had political smarts, and so on. And I wanted a witness. So I'm there with three very big firemen, and one of them – they weren't wearing their hats, but they had their thing on. One of them said, "Hey, I'm really almost embarrassed to ask you this because I'm one of your customers, but you're not connected with the Mafia, are you?" (laughs) I said, "Of course not." I started laughing. Both of us did. So he started laughing and said, "I knew that, but they told me to ask you. The reason I asked is that the

fire was deliberately set." He said, "And they left the money, so it was clearly – they left the money, they left their shotgun, they left a lot of stuff, that if they were interested in – they were just regular arsonists or something, or if somebody had a grudge against you, they would have done something different." And it was professionally done. I knew that that had happened.

VC: So when was the third fire?

EP: It was September 11th, 1973, the same day that Salvador Allende was killed. Pardon me. No, no. It was November 11th. It was two months after Salvador Allende was killed, and two months of the anniversary of 9/11, which is September 11th. That's why I – anyway, it was November 11th of '73. And then Watergate started in '74, and so on and so forth.

So after – the final thing was, when I was a teenager, I got a job being a counselor in a music camp, and one of my charges was a lovely young woman who was the daughter – girl. (laughs) She was like eleven years old, so I shouldn't call her a woman or something like that. Or even younger, I don't know. Anyway, Jennifer Fox. And her parents, Sid and Jeanine, were the people who ran the camp. And he was the former head of the music department at Temple University in Philadelphia, but he was blacklisted. A close friend of Paul Robeson. So they moved out to Los Angeles and she started a children's music thing. And together they started this music camp. So I remained friends with them, and because of their love of folk music and so on, I was with them and am sort of in touch with Jennifer all these years. And she grew up, she became a scholar, and she got her degree at UCLA, Ph.D. in Latin American Studies, and she's an expert on Cuba.

Sometime, like in the middle eighties, Jennifer was on a panel at UCLA around Cuba. She's very attractive. And she was divorced at the time. One of the panelists, a Cuban American professor, asked her to go for a drink with him. So she went. So he gets sloshed, she's not, she's also thinking about what's going to happen next. (laughs) He starts bragging, and he says, "You ever hear of the Ash Grove?" And she said, "Yes." "Well," he says, "I was the person that led these – you know it was burned down in 1972." And she said, "Oh, yeah? Really?" And he says, "Yeah. It was my job to go to the – I met the people that were recruited for the job in Plummer Park, on Santa Monica Boulevard, not far from the Ash Grove. We had a meeting, the guy gave the assignments, and then we –" So he was contact between – and I was contact all of the – so Jennifer gets out of the date. She goes home and she calls me like one in the morning, terrified. She wants to know, of course – tells me the whole story. So there the circle was complete on that particular fire. And it was the same sorts of people, the same people from the Alfa 45, or whatever they're called.

VC: Right. _____?

EP: That Alfa group?

VC: Yeah.

EP: That's the name of the Cuban brigade that was trained in –

VC: In the south?

EP: Yeah, organized in the south, but then I think they went to the Dominican Republic, or one of the – Honduras. Either Dominican Republic or Honduras, for the staging

point for the invasion of the Bay of Pigs. And they suffered the losses and they're forever embittered, and so on and so forth. Nowadays, they're old and fat.

So anyway, so that's the story of that particular fire.

VC: The second fire was in '72, and then a year later they went back and then really burned it?

EP: No. A different group of people burned it. But I won't talk about it. I don't think I have to. Our previous conversation made it pretty clear. Yeah. So anyway, that was the – the thing was is that what the fires did was unsettle the entire place, so it ultimately enervated me and the place and the people, and it was a constant building up to, and then having to deal with, negativity. So this is what happens. So it was the beginning of a strained period. The shock of it, and then getting it together, and people leaving, having to – fortunately, in the kitchen, I managed to get a whole group of people who moved out together from Cleveland. That was Anita Fry and – Patricia was out here, but Berta was also from Cleveland, and the whole kitchen staff was. Katy, Quinn, Bill. There was a whole group of people that moved out – Anita moved out first, but she had the job and she was – so then the others followed her, and she was head waitress and could hire them. They were wonderful. They were very collective and kind, good people.

VC: Just so I'm clear. There were three fires in about four years? Is that right?

EP: Yeah.

VC: Wow! That's almost like a full frontal assault, on a club.

EP: Yeah. There was another major thing that happened, but I don't want to talk about it now. I will talk about it. But it was as big, and unsettling.

VC: And none of that would have happened if there was no – I mean, that happened because of the status of the Ash Grove, like the Unitarian Church, as a place for the Left here in L.A.

EP: Yeah, right. Or – yeah, right. I mean, different constituencies, but –

VC: Right.

EP: I mean, overlapping constituencies and definitely services provided, so to speak. Which one is the highest power?

VC: What?

EP: I asked which is the higher power. (both laugh) Well, Reverend Fritchman, the famous reverend of the Unitarian Church, married me twice, so there was that connection also. (laughs) And I got my early education there. A lot of it just – when I was in high school – I think I was still – but maybe not. But anyway, right around that age I became good friends with a great pianist, _____. And her parents were pillars of the Unitarian Church, so she took me there and I heard Paul Robeson, I heard Pete Seeger, I heard William – I heard a couple of really – God, I can't remember his name. He was sort of a progressive newscaster. And he talked about – gave a lecture on the differences between China and India as newly emerging colonial independent nations. This was in the early fifties. That was a good education for me.

VC: Interesting.

EP: I didn't go to church regularly, but I did actually go to church sometimes just to hear Wally Hilly play the organ. He's a great organist, a very quiet man, a socialist. When you got to know him – I mean, he never really – but he volunteered his help

when People's Songs was formed in 1946 or something like that. After Pete and other people returned from World War II and they formed People's Songs as an organization – and there was a chapter in Los Angeles. But Wally, first being a lettered musician, was the first transcriber for People's Songs and then for Sing Out! And a lot of his life at Sunset Hall, which is a retirement home for the Unitarian Church and the Unitarians in Los Angeles. It still exists. I spend some time there.

And Wally asked me – in 1990 there was a move to close Sunset Hall because it wasn't paying its bills or something, so he asked me – he called Pete Seeger to see if Pete would do a benefit for Sunset Hall, because the board had voted already to close it. Pete said he would do it if I would produce it, because he didn't want him to come there and have – whatever. So I produced it, not at the church but at a beautiful thirteen hundred seat – my favorite auditorium, medium sized auditorium in Los Angeles. The Robert Frost Auditorium. It's Culver City High School. A beautiful theater built by WPA in 1938 or something like that. It's just gorgeous. I mean, acoustically perfect. I've never seen a theater where the furthest seat away from the thing is like a hundred and fifty feet, something like that. It's a perfect auditorium. When I discovered it, I just started using it and for a while there it was a really popular place.

VC: In Culver City High?

EP: Yeah, it's Culver City High School. It's called the Robert Frost Auditorium. And we sold the thing out, and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people couldn't get in. It was a huge success.

But anyway, so when I started to plan this concert, I agreed to do it, I met with the person who was head of Sunset Hall, the retirement home, Joan – I forget her last name. Terrific person. Great person. Because I didn't have an office, I started using their office, so we became even closer and had dinner together, and so on. I had moved from where I was living in Venice, which became untenable, and – maybe it was '92, I think. Yeah, '92, '93. Ninety-two. I was living with a relative at the time and it didn't work out, so I called a friend of mine who had some rental properties and asked if there were any properties that needed house tending. So he gave me – there was one, and I was sort of tending a semi-empty mansion right in what is now called Gunfire Alley.

VC: Oh, where's that?

EP: It was like on Hobart and 4th Street or something like that. It was beautiful, but, you know, you actually – I kind of heard gunfire a couple of times when I was out there. I said, "Can I move there?" He says, "We have no intention of selling it, and the market is down now, and this and that." And nobody could afford it anyway. So I moved in there, and then a month later, his partner, who I didn't even know he had a partner, called me up and said, "You have to move." So I called Jerry. Jerry said, "That's ridiculous. I'll call you right back." He called me back and he said, "Ed, we have a situation. Actually, this Alanon, they want to take it over and they're offering a huge amount of money," and blah, blah, blah, blah.

So I went to Joan and I said, "We have two choices. One, I move in here till the concert is done and I can find a place, or I have to stop working on the concert and look for a place. And I was going to make some money off the concert. So she

just took me to a place and said, "Yeah, here." So I wound up staying there for like two years. And I sort of paid for myself by running a political discussion group. But still, these very vigorous ninety-year-olds, people who are bright and had political – one of them, a really good friend of mine, Nellie Gillis, who was a nurse in World War II, brilliant mind. A couple of people, you know, they were old commies and all of that. But in general, it was really a very good, healthy discussion. Plus, I drove the bus and took them to cultural events and to voting and to the park, museums, and if they had a medical appointment. It was like nothing. It was like two hours a day out of my life, and the rest of the – you know, whatever.

VC: Sounds kind of ideal.

EP: It was. And decent food and a private room, and so on. So it was really good. And all of it free.

VC: That's great.

EP: Yeah. It was a good exchange. And then the Ash Grove on the pier had matured to the point where – and I found a decent place in Santa Monica, and so I moved out there at that point, in '94. We opened in the middle of '95.

So anyway, so I am connected in the Unitarian Church, to go back to the subject.

VC: Why don't we stop there? It's been about two hours.

EP: Okay. Yes. Well, it's four-thirty.

[end]